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An inaugural Dissertation
on Dysentery as it appeared in the
Counties of Loudoun & Fauquier
Virginia by James Bailey Sullivan

No 60 J. 6th

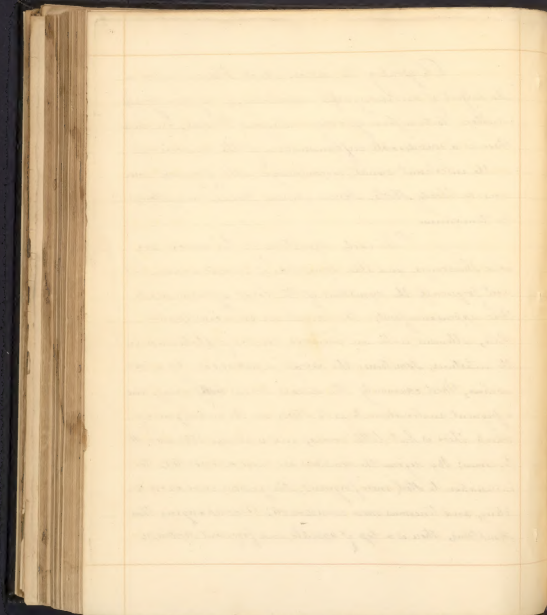
Revised March 19th 1823

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Depository the disease which I have selected as the subject of an Enquiry, is defined by most Authors to be a fever of a very contagious Nature, in which there is a considerable inflammation of the mucous coat of the intestinal canal, accompanied with frequent mucous or bloody stools, severe griping pains, and followed by tenesmus.

The early symptoms of this disease are cold shiverings, and other symptoms of febrile action, but most frequently the symptoms of the local affection make their appearance first; The bowels are in a constipated state, attended with an unusual degree of flatulence in the intestines, sometimes the disease is ushered in by a diarrhoea, Most commonly the disease begins with griping, and a frequent inclination to go to stool, in the indulgence of which there is but little voided, and is always attended with tenesmus; As degrees the symptoms are more exasperated, the inclination to stool more frequent, the griping more excruciating, and tenesmus more considerable; Accompanying these symptoms, there is a loss of appetite, and frequent sickness;



Nausea, and vomiting also affect the patient; The stools although frequent are small in quantity, and are often without any natural faeces intermixed, When the natural faeces do appear, they are generally under the form of small, compact, and hard substances, known by the name of *Seylala*.

The causes which have generally been ascribed by Authors to the introduction of this distressing complaint; are a vitiated state of the Atmosphere, cold a moisture succeeding quickly to intense heat, or great drought, whereby the perspiration is suddenly checked, and a determination is suddenly made to the intestines, it is likewise not unfrequently induced, by some acrid indigestible substance taken into the Stomach; This disease occurs especially in Summer, and Autumn, at the same time with Autumnal Remittent, and Inter-mittent fevers, and with these it is sometimes combined or complicated; therefore Dysentery may be induced by the same exciting causes which produce those fevers.

By most Authors this disease is supposed to be of a

contagious nature, in consequence of making its first appearance, in a very limited number of patients, and then progressing with the greatest rapidity, spreading its ravages to a most alarming extent, and giving almost uncontested proof of its pretensions to mortality, by the numbers which it consigns to an early grave; so soon as an inquiry was made by physicians as to the cause of its being so widely diffused, they being more willing to account for its origin, from accidental circumstances, and afterwards by contagion; They either directly, or indirectly traced the cause of the disease of all their patients, to a supposed infected spot, or garment, or someone actually labouring under the disease; Thus in my estimation have most Physicians placed their opinions on an erroneous foundation, as to the cause of Dysentery; It is true I believe an Atmosphere saturated with the exhalations arising from the faces of a Dysenteric patient, may occasion the disease, but not sooner than the effluvia arising from any other putrid matter either Animal, or Vegetable, which never had any communication with

a person labouring under that complaint; No matter how widely I may differ in opinion from the learned and numerous Authors who have written on this disease,

I feel myself bound by candour to make this acknowledgment of my sentiments, not only the experience I have had in this disease, confirms me in the belief, that Dysentery is not a contagious disorder; but the opinion of my preceptor (Doct Powell) to whom originally I am indebted for this belief, strengthens and bears me out in this conclusion. When the Dysentery prevailed as an epidemic in my native State, and County, persons innumerable were attacked by the disease, who never had an opportunity of receiving it by contagion, it prevailed in a very dry and warm season, the Atmosphere appeared much deteriorated, and which appeared very evidently to predispose the system to the reception of the disease, and, an excess of any kind more than usual, committed by the person, when labouring under the predisposing or remote cause, was sufficient to stimulate the disease into action; The vitiated state of the Atmosphere

which. Itake to be the remote, and external cause, how powerful so ever it may be, is not sufficient to produce an effect, without a concurrence of the occasional or exciting causes, an excess of any kind such as eating, drinking, or violent exertion. I consider the proximate or exciting causes. When the exciting or immediate causes are strong, they will produce the effect, independently of the predisposing or remote causes, but when the disease is very slight, and often yields to the efforts of Nature in restoring the healthy action; but when there is unfortunately a concurrence of the predisposing, and immediate causes, then it is, we see the disease in its most perfect and dangerous form.

I have endeavoured as far as I am able to show Dysentery is not a contagious disease, but depends entirely on the state of the Atmosphere, which is evidently the occasion of the disease, and which is in its action uniform; always according to the aptitude of the constitution to the reception of the disease.

The cure of Dysentery depends entirely on the stage of the complaint when medical aid is demanded by the patient; if fortunately it should be determined



when in its recent state, there is little more to be done, than
to stop the inflammatory ^{action} accompanying this complaint, and to
correct the morbid action of the glands, which pour their acrid
secretions into the intestinal cavity, this morbid derangement
of the glands appears to be induced by a direct and sym-
pathetic action with the Stomach; which primarily receiv-
es the impression from a disordered atmosphere.

When the Proctitioner is called in the secondary
stage of the disease, there are few diseases better calcu-
lated to impose on the understanding of an inexperience
ed Physician, and seduce him beyond the bounds
of discretion; it is attended with the most deceptive indi-
cations, the hemorrhages seem to require depletion by re-
peated venesection, the laxity of the intestines obtrusive
remedies, the pains of the bowels and Abdomen, anodyne
draughts, and injections, an indulgence in which
is sure to be attended with the most injurious conse-
quences, and will ultimately result in the most mortal
effects; by removing the exciting cause of the disease,
by emetics, and cathartics, we most frequently modify the



symptoms, afterwards by sudorifics and tonics, are induced a favourable termination of the disease. The fever attendant on Dysentery has been divided by Doct Chopman into Intermittent, Remittent, and Continued, Which last he says is either Drylammatory, or Typhus; In all the cases of Dysentery, which have come under my observation, I have never met with one solitary case, where there was a complete intermission of fever; they all evidently assumed the Remittent form, and there never was an entire absence of fever, until the occasional causes were removed, but as the origin of these different forms of fever, have been ascribed to one common cause, I do not know why it should not put on the intermittent form, and which is more than probable, coming from such unquestionable Authority; in my opinion Dysentery is always at first attended with a most violent inflammatory fever, by inattention and neglect of which, it soon degenerates into a fever of a Typhoid type, by injudicious management, it either puts on the form of Intermittent, or Remittent fever, according to the susceptibility of the constitution of the patient, to the improper



of either of these fevers; It has been asserted by modern
practitioners of considerable eminence, the Intermittent,
the Relapsing Intermittent, and continued fevers, the Inflam-
matory Dysentery, the Typhus Dysentery, and Yellow fever,
depend on the different proportions of Miasmata blended
with the Atmosphere; there is little doubt in my mind these
assertions are strictly correct, if the Typhus form of Dysentery
exists as a primary disease, which I have not been able
in the course of my observation to ascertain; I have always
found it a secondary disease, or the effect of a miasmatic
inflammatory case; In all such cases the transition from
one stage of the complaint, ^{to the other} is quite sudden, from being
a disease of considerable arterial action, it suddenly
falls into an opposite state of inaction, a great irritabil-
ity of the nervous system, accompanied with great mor-
tification of strength, and a rapid depression of the pulse,
which is, I presume owing entirely to the great and sudden
accumulation of Morbid Matter in the Intestinal canal;
Dr. Thomas mentions a late Writer (Doct. Huxley) who
asserts this stage of the complaint to be contagious, he



insists that the simple Dysentery, & that virus is contagious
nor the Intermittent, or Remittent forms of the disease, that
the combination with Typhus alone is possessed with that
property, and thus he insists originates not in the virus
specific to the Dysentery, but in the contagion of fever;
I know not what idea the Doct^r wishes to convey, by
his ambiguous remarks, we might infer, that
Dysentery attended with the Typhus form, ^{often} was ca-
pable of producing a similar complaint in another
by contagion; which I am unwilling to admit, and
is in direct opposition to the practical information I
have received, he acknowledges the Dysentery to be produced
of one specific virus; consequently it is incapable of
being communicated by contagion, if any disease is
produced by the contagion of fever, it must be the
Typhus fever which will exist independent of Dysentery
The Pathology of Dysentery, I believe to be
the same with ^{that of} all other cases of Phlegmasia; the differ-
ence of this and all other inflammatory affections
arises principally from the part affected added to that

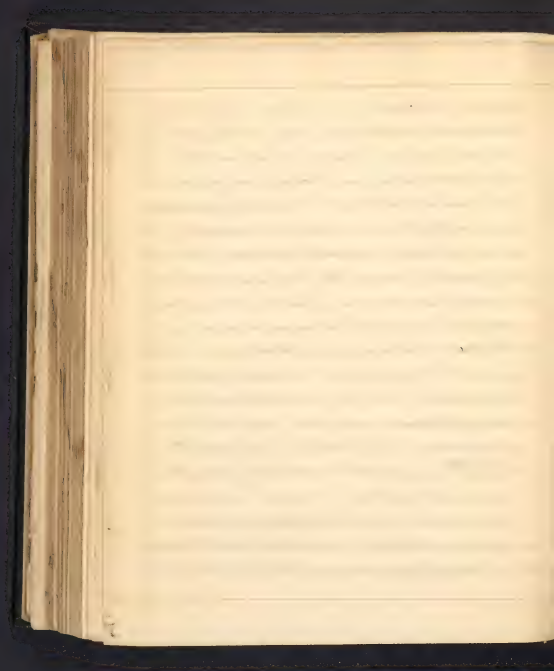


of the Morbid cause, similar to most other inflammatory
diseases it is accompanied with a want of healthy
action on the skin; respiration so essentially necessary
to health is suppressed, which morbid arrange-
ment greatly aggravates and adds to the pain and
sufferings of the patient; If this view of the Pathology
of Dysentery be correct, the indications of cure are
sufficiently obvious. They are to remove inflam-
mation, with the morbid irritation, and Spasms at-
tending it, to produce a free discharge of the contents
of the stomach and bowels, and to restore healthy
action to the skin. The relief of Spasms (^{follows} ~~supplies~~ ^{relief} ~~supplies~~)
& alldiarrhoea is a subordinate indication, and its comple-
tion of course, when the principle ones are accomplished.

Two different stages are constantly seen in the course
of this disease, therefore to treat it properly, due attention
shall be paid to that which is present, at the time when
advice is applied for; When applied to in the early stages
of the disease, I think the practice becomes plain and
easy; I have never deviated much from the mode of



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Treatment laid down by Doct Chermans. When the in-
flammatory symptoms run high, and the patient is
fevering and plethoric, Bleeding is indispensable, and
must be resorted to as circumstances may require, it is
always conducive to the cure, it checks inflammation
more promptly than any remedy we are possessed of, it
aids in resolving the spasmodic constriction of the inter-
stines, of course, it renders them more susceptible to the
impression of our remedies, I next exhibit an emetic
composed of ℥ss of Spessacuanha, and ʒj of
the Tartar of Antimony, and Potash, given in two
slow doses; by its operation it relieves the Stomach
of its Nauseous, and morbidly irritating contents,
it allays the spasm, and lastly accelerates the peris-
taltic motion of the intestines; it stimulates the ^{capillaries} ~~capillaries~~
taneous, by a sympathetic action they relieve the hot
dry, and parched Skin by a general diaphoresis;
it acts as a power which makes a strong and general
impression on the system, and which arrests the disease,
the or changes its conditions in virtue of that impression

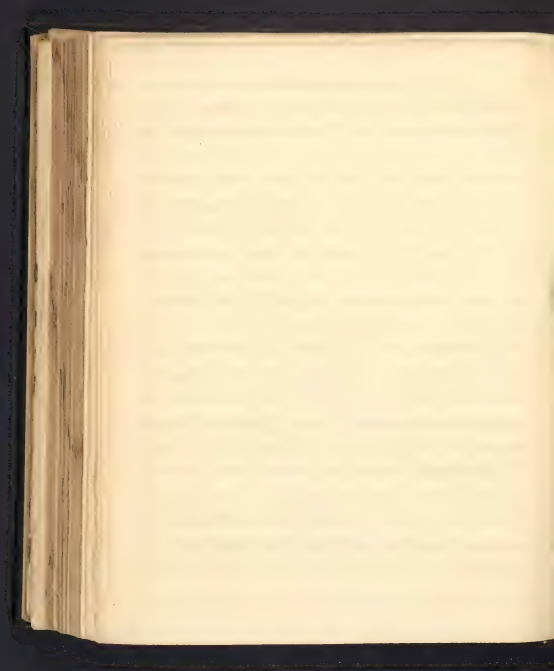


to relieve the bowels of their morbid contents, I must resort to mercurial purgatives, or purgatives composed of $\frac{1}{11}$ grs of Calomel $\frac{1}{6}$ grs of Rhubarb, and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ of Saturated Magnesia, this purgative removes more effectually the offending contents of the intestines, and proves more salutary in its effects than any purgative

I have hitherto employed; after this Ol. Ricini to the amount of $\frac{1}{2}$ z, or any of the Neutral Salts, are very beneficial, and favourite prescriptions; should the bowels be in a more than usual degree of constipation, we must necessarily resort to the most active injections, depletion ought to be continued until the inflammatory action is partially broken or overcome, if the Abundant discharges continue, as is frequently the case, I know of no remedy comparable to the justly celebrated remedy of Doct. Chottman, and which has in all cases, where it has a fair ^{trial} ~~chance~~, proved to be an allible remedy in the cure of this stage of the complaint, the following combination is his



prescriptions. R. Pulv. opii ℥ ss IV gas. Calomel ℥ ss VI gas
Spicaeantha VII gas Mix and divide into VIII pow-
ders one to be taken every two or three hours. He
says this is not certain. The most active diapho-
retic we possess, but its purgative effects still more
important, it composes, irritates, relaxes the
surface, gently evacuates the bowels, and makes
new impressions, which are altogether unintelligible,
all must acknowledge the utility of the Calomel,
which acts as well by altering the Biliary and
other secretions, as by its evacuant power. Spica-
eantha the most valuable Article of the Materia
Medica in the Cure of Dysentery, has been pre-
scribed in a variety of ways, by different Authors,
towards the attainment of the cure of this disease,
by Cullen its medicinal virtues have been as-
cribed alone to its purgative power, by Sir
John Pringle to its emetic and cathartic pro-
perties; by Doct. Thomas to its sudorific and
diuretic virtues; with the view of determining



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the circulation to the surface of the body, small
doses of Opocacuanha may be taken every three
or four hours, after proper evacuations, so as to produce
and keep up a gentle perspiration without exciting
much nausea. By these means we may be able
to cut the disease abruptly short, and arrest it
in its progress: Opocacuanha has been by some
practitioners prescribed as an emetic, but this
I believe to have been of no ^{great} advantage. By
Doct. Christman its Medicinal Virtues are as-
cribed neither to its Emetic, Cathartic, nor
Diaphoretic properties, as we have others. The
science possessed of each of these properties in
a much more eminent degree, which are altoge-
ther useless in this disease, I presume it to act
in some specific action, peculiar to it alone, by
making such an impression on the system, as
to give scope to its a favourable termination,
and heal the action.

Opocacuanha is one of the favourite medicines of the



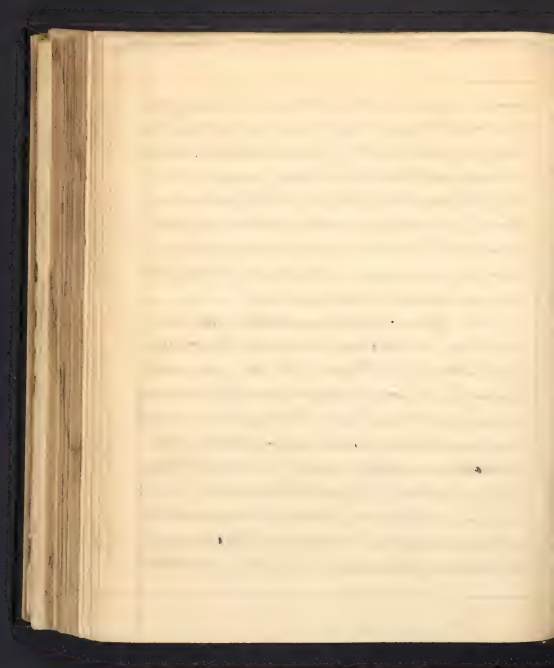
illustrious Sturmius in the cure of dysentery,
has lately become a very general, and justly celebrated
remedy in the cure of this disease; it is principally
prescribed by modern practitioners, as is directed by
Doct. Stromanus in obstinate constipation of the
bowels occasioned by stricture in some one of the
Intestines; Opium combined with Calomel in
large doses will soon relieve this distressing
symptom, the Opium acts by its antispasmodic
power; the Calomel by its purgative effect;
When Tormentum and Tenaxus make their ap-
pearance in the last stage of the disease, as
they frequently do, Opium is much depended
upon. When there is much Tormentum, and ac-
cumulations in the bowels, the common oily
Mixture is well adapted. R. H. Ricini ss Sach ij
Ag Menth ij ss g- Arab ij Sandarum ss q. s.
M ss every one or two hours. Tenaxus is re-
lieved by Anodyne injections, and when these
cannot be employed an opium pill of ss or W grs



may be placed in the rectum, it is more frequently retained than the injection, and we trace the same good effects resulting from its introduction.

Calomel not the least important remedy in the cure of this complaint, acts at first by its evacuant power, and lastly by a property which it possesses over all other medicines of the *Materia Medica*, in correcting, or changing the morbid actions of the glands diseased in this complaint.

The different Antimonial preparations have been highly extolled as remedies in Dysentery; By Cullen, Tartar Emetic has been given with advantage, he says he has found nothing more proper or convenient than Tartar Emetic given in small doses, and at such intervals as may determine their operation to be chiefly by stool; The Evacuated Glazg Antimony has been highly extolled by Sir John Pringle in the cure of Dysentery, therefore it may be resorted to if other remedies fail, in consequence of the harshness of the Medicine in its operation, it will be most advisable to



begin with four or five grains, increasing the quantity according to the effect produced. In looking over a work I have just procured, *In the Coated Glass of Antimony* is more favourably spoken of by Doct. Young, This Writer says he has tried it often, both where bleeding and vomits, have been running, and where they have not, with the equal success, &c In its operation he says it sometimes makes the patient sick, and vomits, it purges almost every one, but I have known it cure without any sensible evacuation or sickness, nay, in violent Dysenteries they purge seldom with it than without it. When Doct. Young asserts this remedy to cure a confirmed Dysentery without any sensible evacuation, I believe his assertions to be not within the pale of reason, and without any foundation in fact, it might have been beneficial in cases where there was a determination to the intestines, from suppressed perspiration, but even in this case a restoration of the healthy action to the skin would have produced an evacuation by perspiration, which would have been insupportable; of its virtues as a remedy I know but little;



having never made use of the Medicine, but I presume its beneficial effects to result from its sensible evacuant power, either as a diaphoretic, emetic, or Cathartic.

In particular stages of the disease when the only wish is to induce sweating; The Dovers Powder, says (D^r. Chapman) ^{is} preferable to all other diaphoretics, it will never disappoint our expectations.

A case of Dysentery lately came under my observation, which was occasioned by a suppression of perspiration, assisted by astringent Medicines, and which were taken as prophylactics; the patient was a strong, stout, athletic man, 4 grs of Ipecacuanha and 1ij grs of Opium ^{in combination} were given him by D^r. Powell, which had the desired effect of relieving the patient immediately of the complaint; the Opium was given to overcome the emetic power of the Ipecacuanha, and to direct its operation to the intestines and skin; by its Cathartic, and diaphoretic properties, this case was easily removed as there was no predisposing cause, the immediate or exciting cause being removed the



disease ceased to exist. Warmth as an external applica-
-tion has been spoken of by several writers (both Ancient and Mo-
-dern) as being very beneficial in all bowel affections, Syden-
-ham recommends the flannel, or fleecy hosey Waistcoat in
-simple Diarrhea, in the cure of which, he says, it is in-
-dispensable. In the treatment of Dysentery, says Doct^r Ledi-
-well: the Article of cloathing is of no small importance.
Flannel should be worn next to the skin in general, with
one or two additional folds of it over the Abdomen—

Doct^r Ledi in his essay on the diseases of hot Climates,
recommends fomentations in the cure of Dysentery,
when the whole Abdomen is hard, tense, and painful,
says the Doct^r immediate ease is often procured by fo-
-menting it with a decoction of Elder flowers, and Cha-
-marille, together with some heads of White Poppies, sprink-
-ling the flannels abt in the fomentation with camphora-
-ted Spirit of Wine, immediately before they are applied.

It has been very earnestly recommended by Doct^r Rhop-
-man in the following manner, as an auxiliary to a-
-phroresis; great advantage will be gained by warmth



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applied to the skin, all must be acquainted with the advantages of fomentations, in relieving the spasm and promoting diaphoresis; The Warm Bath is eminently useful and acts upon the same principle as the topical applications, but on account of the difficulty of procuring a Bath, and the inconvenience necessarily attendant on its employment, it is not a remedy adapted to general practice, and may therefore be dispensed with, except in cases of great emergency, and we should always remember it, as one of our resources in difficulty and danger: In Children however the above objections do not apply, and we may resort to it more frequently, and with greater benefit than Adults. Plasters are eminently useful and cannot be dispensed with in Dysentery, they must be applied to the Abdomen, and not to the extremities as is too frequently the case, in all local diseases, they are more beneficial when applied near the part affected, previous to their application, it is best to premise one or two bleedings, and evacuations from the bowels; some of the stimulating embrocations may also be used in the milder cases; perhaps there is no remedy we make use of against which there is so much prejudice as the



application of a blister to the Abdomen; and I am sure there is no occasion on which we ought more steadily to exert our authority. The proper diet in Dysentery consists in such articles of food as do not increase the active inflammation of the bowels, and which are of easy digestion; they should be fluid, the delicate and demulcents are to be much employed, as barley water, rice water, Mucilage of Gum Arabic, infusion of Slippery Elm, Toast and Water, Arrow Root, Sago, Tapioca occasionally varied for gelatinous broths. In the treatment of the Typhus form of Dysentery, or the secondary stage of the disease, it is obvious, a different practice is demanded, we should attempt the cure by prescribing an emetic, and moderate cathartics, after having evacuated the morbid contents of the stomach and intestines, we should next resort to such remedies as are of a cordial and stimulating nature, such as opium, Vol. Alk. & Wine &c. Doct^r Chopman thinks it safest to salivate when the Typhus form of fever occurs in the course of the disease, I have never seen the system (says the Doct^r) completely under the influence of Mercury without mitigating the symptoms and producing finally a recovery. Assertions coming from



such authority and so unequivocally made cannot be too much depended upon. When the relaxed and weakened state of the bowels seemed to keep up the disease, I have seen the most decided benefit result, by administering a combination of Nitric Acid, and Opium. R. Acid Nitrici ℥ij Spiritus Ag. Puræ ℥ij M. i℥ three or four times during the day; The infusion of Quassia, Colombo, or Cascarella, are very good Tonics, and may be administered till the bowels have recovered their vigour and proper tone. Nothing would be more improper in this stage of the disease, than the too early administration of Astringents and Opates, When the bowels have been evacuated of their contents, and the patient's strength is exhausted by frequent returns of the complaint, or from their weak and relaxed condition, a use of these remedies will prove both proper, and beneficial; taking care to obviate ^{Continued} ~~continued~~ by administering a few grains of Rhubarb, or some such gentle laxative. The following prescription is the best I am acquainted with. R. Extract Lig. Campeach. i℥ Malt. Coda ʒij Junc. Catechu ℥j Spirit. Nib. Mosch. ℥j. M. of which

mixture take two table spoons full every three or four hours.
 The Chronic state of Dysentery is that which proves very difficult,
 and demands much attention. The indications says Doct. Chop-
 man are to restore action to the surface, the Dovers Powder he
 particularly recommends assisted by a proper regimen; this
 keeps up a general diaphoresis better than Tonics which some-
 times fail. In this stage of the disease a Flannel Roller is
 very advantageous, it embraces, says Doct. Dewar, all the
 virtues of the warm bath without its inconveniences, by
 means of the Flannel bandage, the Abdomen is kept con-
 stantly and steadily of a certain temperature, subject to no
 variation, or change by which the part can take cold, and
 it can be continued as long as may be necessary, it removes
 the local Torpor of the Abdomen, which gives the sensation
 as if the patient had no bowels, it restores the proper ~~for~~
 feelings of this part, it not only strengthens the Abdomi-
 nal muscles, and prevents Dyspnœa, and enables res-
 piration to be performed with more ease, ~~but~~ it strength-
 ens the intestines, and accelerates the curative process.
 The benefits resulting from the use of the bandage

are its affording mechanical support, and keeping up an equable temperature. There are cases however which are protracted by visceral disease, especially by that of the Liver, when this happens, there is a dusky sallow hue of the countenance, tenderness upon pressure over the region of the liver, and a clayey appearance in the faeces, when these symptoms are present, Calomel is to be resorted to, administering it to such an extent as to keep up a gentle affection of the mouth, until the symptoms are mitigated; accompanied with the Calomel the Nitric Acid may also be given.